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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4221

RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 2239

RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2695

RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2816

RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1278

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2084

RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2440

RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2864

RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 5303

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1986

RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000222

AF/S FOR B. WALCH

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR

STATE PASS TO USAID FOR L.DOBINS AND J. HARMON

COMMERCE FOR ROBERT TELCHIN

SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ECON ZI

SUBJECT: ZIM NOTES 03-13-2009

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¶1. SUMMARY  
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Topics of the week:

- Tragic Car Accident Results in Death of Tsvangirai's Wife...
- Roy Bennett Out on Bail...
- Surge in Land Invasions Continues...
- Retired Army Chief Dies...
- New Independent Newspaper Seeks Approval...
- Australia Makes Non-Humanitarian Donation...
- Cholera on the decline...
- Emergency Health Summit...
- Marketing/Media Survey Results Released...
- IMF Article IV Mission Reports Traction...
- Postal Authority Holds up Delivery of U.S. Mail for Lack of Payment...
- Internet, E-Mail and International Calls Reduced to a Crawl...
- Slight Decline in Cost of Consumer Basket...
- COMESA Summit on...

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On the Political/Social Front  
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¶2. Tragic Car Accident Results in Death of Tsvangirai's Wife...  
Susan Tsvangirai, the wife of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, was killed in a tragic car accident on March 6 while driving to a MDC rally in Manicaland. Their vehicle was struck by an oncoming truck at an accident-prone stretch of road. The prime minister was also in the vehicle, but emerged with only minor injuries. A church service and public memorial held in Harare resulted in an outpouring of support, as thousands of well-wishers paid their respects. President Mugabe and a handful of senior ZANU-PF officials (excluding security chiefs) set aside political animosities and paid their respects in person at the church service. Ambassador McGee attended both events and also the interment the following day in the Tsvangirai home village. Tsvangirai will take several weeks off with his family in South Africa before returning to work. See

Harare 194 and 217.

¶13. Roy Bennett Out on Bail... The incarcerated Deputy Minister of Agriculture-designate, Roy Bennett, was freed on bail from a Mutare prison on March 12, following a Supreme Court ruling that upheld a lower court decision to grant him bail. State prosecutors had sought to delay Bennett's release and even arrested the Mutare magistrate who had authorized his release on February 24 after the initial High Court ruling. See Harare 218.

¶14. Surge in Land Invasions Continues... The surge in land invasions, eviction notices, and prosecutions targeting the 400 to 600 white farmers remaining in Zimbabwe has been encouraged by Attorney General Johannes Tomana, President Mugabe, and a controversial High Court ruling that stated that Zimbabwe was not bound by the SADC Tribunal judgment in November 2008 that upheld the property rights of 77 white-owned farms. Tsvangirai has unsuccessfully pressed Mugabe on calling for an end to the invasions. See Harare 207.

¶15. Retired Army Chief Dies... Former commander of the Zimbabwe defense forces General Vitalis Zvinavashe died on March 10 following a struggle with cancer. Zvinavashe was an independence fighter who entered politics and most recently lost a parliamentary campaign to an MDC opponent in 2008. Following those elections, Zvinavashe, who was an MDC opponent in 2008. Following those elections, Zvinavashe, who prior to the 2002 presidential election said that service chiefs would not recognize a president who had not been part of the liberation war (read Tsvangirai), told other ZANU-PF candidates to "accept the reality" that the MDC had won and urged people to preserve the peace. The MDC issued a statement praising him as a

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liberation hero and mourning his death. See Harare 217.

¶16. New Independent Newspaper Seeks Approval... Trevor Ncube's local media company, Zimind Publishers Group, has announced their intention to begin publishing a daily independent newspaper in Zimbabwe. The group has applied for licenses and is awaiting approval to launch the new publication that will be entitled "NewsDay." Zimind CEO Raphael Khumalo told us that the publishing company has been in discussion with media regulatory authorities since the signing of the September 15, 2008 global political agreement, and had recently discussed the project with the new Minister of Media, Information and Publicity, Webster Shamu. Currently, the state-controlled Herald is the only daily newspaper. Zimind already publishes two weekly newspapers, the Zimbabwe Independent and the Standard.

¶17. Australia Makes Non-Humanitarian Donation... The Australian government this week shifted its policy towards Zimbabwe by saying it will expand assistance beyond humanitarian aid to help the national unity government in Harare serve the population. Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith announced on March 11 that his government would pledge US\$6.5 million to help restore Zimbabwe's water, sanitation, and health sectors. Smith stated that the Australian government "recognizes there are some risks to this approach. We are under no illusions about the fragility of the political situation in Zimbabwe."

¶18. Cholera on the decline... The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, for the week ending 28 February, there was a 25 percent decrease in suspected new cases and a 42 percent decrease in deaths when compared to the prior week. WHO attributes the decline to improved case management at cholera treatment centers (CTCs) and to cholera prevention campaign programs emphasizing early treatment; funded in part by USAID. However, the same report notes that the proportion of community deaths - i.e. those occurring outside clinics and cholera treatment centers - remains "appalling" in Midlands, Mashonaland East, and Manicaland provinces. As of March 10, the outbreak has claimed 4,041 and affected more than 89,000.

¶19. Emergency Health Summit... A two-day Summit in Harare was attended by over 300 senior health professionals on March 5-6. The theme was Get the Zimbabwe Health System Moving within the next 100 days. Prime Minister Tsvangirai encouraged participants to ensure

that a "health system was put in place that is the pride of our nation and the envy of our continent." The health system has suffered a decade of neglect with the entire system near collapse and major hospitals in urban areas barely functioning. While practical solutions were offered, significant donor funding is required.

¶10. Marketing/Media Survey Results Released... The latest data from the Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation survey of urban households revealed a host of media and household trends. The most prevalent media trend was a decline in viewership and readership of state-controlled media. Respondents reported ZBC viewership fell from 63 percent in Q4 2007 to just 38 percent in Q4 2008. Readership of the Herald declined 6 percentage points to 38 percent. Reported usage of most household products and staple foods also declined. Among the steepest drops was milk, which fell from 53 percent regular usage to just 35 percent. Only 14 percent of urban residents reported being employed full time in the formal sector.

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On the Economic and Business Front  
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¶11. IMF Article IV Mission Reports Traction... On day four of its mission, IMF staff reported to donor economists good data provision by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and a good level of competence among interlocutors at the RBZ, Finance Ministry and Zimbabwe

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Revenue Authority. The inflow of foreign exchange to banks has increased significantly in two months and tax revenues could be adequate to finance another round of close to US\$100/person foreign exchange payments to civil servants in March. An IMF accountant will arrive this weekend to lay the groundwork for an external audit of the RBZ by an international accountancy firm.

¶12. Postal Authority Holds up Delivery of U.S. Mail for Lack of Payment... Zimbabwe Post recently informed us it was holding up delivery of over 600 bags of incoming mail from the U.S. pending payment of terminal dues and transit charges. We learned that the U.S. Postal Service's bank had held up payments under the erroneous belief that Zimbabwe was under sanctions. Upon clarification, USPS' corporate treasury department authorized a \$110,000 payment to Zimbabwe Post last week.

¶13. Internet, E-Mail and International Calls Reduced to a Crawl... Zimbabwe's internet service providers said their services had been adversely affected by the cessation of operation on March 2, 2009 of one of the two ComOne gateways for data traffic flow out of the country. We learned that international service was disconnected for non-payment of fees.

¶14. Slight Decline in Cost of Consumer Basket... The Herald reported this week that the cost of the consumer basket for an urban family of six fell by 1.83 percent from US\$381.23 in January to US\$374.25 in February, 2009, underpinned by the continued decline in the price of food. The fall could have been greater were it not for significant increases in transport, rent, and utilities.

¶15. COMESA Summit on... The Director for International Trade in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Beatrice Mutetwa, told us that the COMESA Summit, scheduled to occur in Zimbabwe last year but postponed twice, will now take place here before the end of June 2009. The Secretary General of COMESA was in Zimbabwe recently and is consulting with Kenya, which holds the chairmanship, to firm up the date.

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Quote of the Week  
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¶16. "Rest assured we are with you, Honourable Prime Minister. Our hearts on this day and the days to follow are with you." -- President Mugabe speaking at Susan Tsvangirai's memorial service in Harare on March 10.

MCGEE